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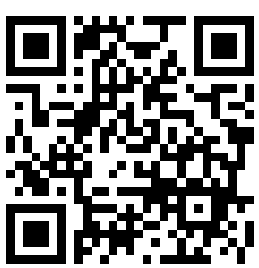

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To the Reader Over my Shoulder

You, reading over my shoulder, peering beneath
My writing arm — I suddenly feel your breath
Hot on my hand or on my nape,
So interrupt my theme, scratching these few
Words on the margin for you, namely you
Too-human shape fixed in that shape : —

All the saying of things against myself
And for myself I have well done myself,
What now, old enemy, shall you do
But quote and underline, thrusting yourself
Against me, as ambassador of myself,
In damned confusion of myself and you ?

For you in strutting, you in sycophancy
Have played too long this other self of me,
Doubling the part of judge and patron
With that of creaking grind-stone to my wit.
Know me, have done : I am a clean spirit
And you for ever flesh. Have done.

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History of the Word

The Word that in the beginning was the Word
For two or three, but elsewhere spoke unheard,
Found Words to interpret it, which for a season
Prevailed until ruled out by Law and Reason
Which, by interpretation's freedom cursed,
In Laws and Reasons logically dispersed;
Which in their turn, found they could do no better
Than fall to Letters and each name a letter.
In the beginning, then, the Word alone,
But now the various tongue-tied Lexicon
In perfect impotence the time nearing
When every ear shall lose his sense of hearing
And every mind by deafness be close shuttered —
But two or three, where first the Word uttered.

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Interruption

If ever against this easy blue and silver
Hazed-over countryside of thoughtfulness
Far behind in the mind and above,
Boots from before and below approach tramping,
Watch how their premonition will display
A forward countryside, low in the distance,
A picture-postcard square of June grass,
Will warm a summer season, trim the hedges,
Cast the river about on either flank,
Start the late cuckoo emptily calling,
Invent a rambling tale of moles and voles,
Furnish a path with stiles.
Watch how the field will broaden, the feet nearing,
Sprout with great dandelions and buttercups,
Widen and heighten. The blue and silver
Fogs at the border of this all-grass.
Interruption looms gigantified,
Lurches against, treads thundering through,
Blots the landscape, scatters all,
Roars and rumbles like a dark tunnel,
Is gone.

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The picture-postcard grass and trees
Swim back to central : it is a large patch,
It is a modest, failing patch of green,
The postage-stamp of its departure,
Clouded with blue and silver, closing in now
To a plain countryside of less and less,
Unpeopled and unfeatured blue and silver,
Before, behind, above.

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Survival of Love

We love, and utterly,
Unnaturally :
From nature lately
By death you freed me,
Yourself free already.

Proof that we are unnatural :
This purposeful
And straining funeral,
Nature's unnatural,
Now become unfunereal.

And indeed merriest when
The gasp and strain
Will twitch like pain,
Clouding the former brain
Of us, the man and woman.

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The Age of Certainty

Content in you,
Andromeda alone,
Yet queen of air and ocean
And every fiery dragon,
Chained to no cliff,
Asking no rescue of me.

Content in you,
Mad Atalanta
Stooping unpausing
Ever ahead
Acquitting me of rivalry.

Content in you,
Invariable she-Proteus
Sole unrecordable
Giving my tablets holiday.

Content in you,
Niobe of no children
Sorrow no calamity.

Content in you,
Helen, foiler of beauty.

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The Beast

Edmund Spenser loathed the Blatant Beast,
Yet to the history's end witheld the stroke
That must, he knew, provoke
Rancour in men that loved the monster least.

And this was prudence : while the Beast lives
The infamy of his ravage is delight
And to the Red Cross Knight
A fore-won laurel of salvation gives.

But the Beast killed is carrion and a worse
Than carrion : which old Spenser would not tell
Knowing his Faerie well —
Therefore to me it falls to write that curse.

This foul Beast, then, was finally overcome
And in no secret combat : the whole city
Flocked out and groaned for pity
To see the Rep Cross Knight urge the blade home.

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Duly they danced, and sang the triumphs due,
Roasting whole oxen on the public spit ;
Twelve mountain peaks were lit
With bonfires : yet their hearts were doubt and rue.

Therefore no grave was deep enough to hold
The Beast, which after days came thrusting out,
Wormy from rump to snout,
His draggled cere-cloth foul with the grave's mould.

Nor could sea hold him : anchored with great stones
He swelled and buoyed them up, paddling to shore
As evident as before
With deep-sea ooze and salty creaking bones.

Lime could not burn him, nor the hot coal-fire :
So often as the good Knight bound him there,
With stink of singeing hair
And scorching flesh the corpse rolled from the pyre.

In the city-gutter would the Beast lie
Praising the Knight for his high valorous deeds :
" Ay, on those water-meads
He slew even me. These death-wounds testify. "

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The Knight governed that city, a man shamed
And shrunken; for the Beast was over-dead,
With wounds no longer red
But gangrenous and loathsome and inflamed.

Not all the righteous judgements he could utter,
Nor mild laws frame, nor public works repair,
Nor wars wage, in despair,
Could bury that same Beast, crouched in the gutter.

A fresh remembrance-banquet to forestall
The Knight turned hermit, went without farewell
To a far moutain-cell:
But the Beast followed as his seneschal,

And there drew water for him and hewed wood
With vacant howling laughter; else all day
Noisome with long decay
Sunning himself at the cave's entry stood.

He would bawl to pilgrims for a dole of bread
To feed the sick saint who once vanquished him
With spear so stark and grim:
Would set a pillow of grass beneath his head,
Would fetch him fever-wort from the pool's brim;
And crept into his grave when he was dead.

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Cracking the Nut Against the Hammer

Believe me not a dolt: I would invent
No proverbs; but considering them
I need to state them:

Beauty impraticable,
Strength undemonstrable;
Lives without end await them.

Yet know me able and quick
To force an ending. How?
Finding a dolt to have begun them.

Finding him where?
On Halfpenny Island where they milk the cats.
Where may that lie?
Near Farthing Island where they milk mice.

How shall he have begun them?
O how indeed, but
Cracking the nut against the hammer.
What nut? Why, sir, the nut...

Believe me not a dolt: I have invented
No proverbs...

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The Terraced Valley

In a deep thought of you and concentration
I came by hazard to a strange region :
The unnecessary sun was not there,
The necessary earth was without care,
Broad sunshine ripened the whole skin
Of ancient earth that was turned outside-in.

Calm sea beyond the terraced valley
Without horizon easily was spread
As it were overhead
Washing the mountain-spurs behind me :
The unnecessary sky was not there,
Therefore no heights, no deeps, no birds of the air.

Neat outside-inside, neat below-above
Hermaphrodising love.
Neat this-way-that-way and without mistake :
On the right hand could slide the left glove.
Neat over-under : the young snake
Through an unbreaking shell his path could break.
Singing of kettles, like a singing brook,
Made out of doors a fireside nook.

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But you, my love, where had you then your
station?
Seeing that on this common earth together
We go not distant from each other
I knew you near me in that strange region,
So searched for you, in hope to see you stand
On some near olive-terrace, in the heat,
The left-hand glove drawn on your right hand,
The empty snake's egg perfect at your feet —

But found you nowhere in the whole land,
And cried disconsolately, until you spoke
Close in the sunshine by me, and your voice
broke
That antique spell with a doom-echoing shout
To once more inside-in and outside-out.

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Oak, Poplar, Pine.

The temple priests though using but one sign
For TREE, distinguish poplar, oak and pine:
Oak, short and spreading — poplar, tall and thin —
Pine, tall, bunched at the top and well inked in.
Therefore in priestly thought all various trees
Must be enrolled, in kind, as one of these.
The fir, the cedar and the deodar
Are pines, so too the desert palm-trees are;
Aspens and birches are of poplar folk
But chestnut, damson, elm and fig are oak.
All might be simple, did the priests allow
That apple-blossom dresses the oak bough,
That dates are pines-cones; but they will not so,
Well taught how pine and oak and poplar grow:
In every temple-court, for all to see
Flourishes one example of each tree
In tricunx. Your high-priest would laugh to think
Of oak boughs blossoming in pagan pink,
Or numerous cones, hung from a single spine,
Sticky yet sweeter than the fruit of vine,
(For vine's no tree; vine is a creeping thing,
Cousin to snake, that with its juice can sting).

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Confront your priest with evident apple-blossom;
Will faith and doubt, conflicting, heave his bosom?
Force dates between his lips, will he forget
That there's no date-palm in the alphabet?
Turn apostate? Even in secret? No,
He'll see the blossom as mere mistletoe.
The dates will be as grapes, good for his needs:
He'll swallow down their stones like little seeds.
And here's no lie, no hypocritic sham:
Believe him earnest-minded as I am.
His script has less, and mine more, characters
Than stand in use with lexicographers.
They end with palm, I see and use the sign
For tree that is to palm as palm to pine,
As apple-bough to oak-bough in the spring:
It is no secrecy but a long looking.

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Act v *Scene* 5

" You choose the old nurse and the little page
To act survivors on your tragic stage,
Each an unnecessary player. "
" No, not unnecessary ", you say; " if none
Survive to moralise on what's been done
This is no tragedy, but dead men's laughter.
Tears are the purge — the nurse's broken line
"O mistress, pretty one, dead!" the page's whine
"Thou too? Alas, fond master!"

" No purge for my complaint: I'd have them own
Small sorrow to be left on-stage alone
And in the bloodiest royal massacre
Either rant out the anti-climax well:
"' A's dead, the bitch!" " So's Oscar: snug in
Hell!" —
Then fall to rifling pocket, belt and purse
With corky jokes in character,
Or, drive the feud yet futher: page with nurse
His jewelled dirk against her sooty cleaver."

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Tail Piece :

A Song to make you and me Laugh.

Let me tell you the story of how I began :
I began as the knife-boy and ended as the boot-
man,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and
a button,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and
a button,
With nothing in my pockets.

Let me tell you the story of how I went on :
I began as the lift-boy and ended as the lift-man,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and
a button,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and
a button,
With nothing in my pockets.

I found it very easy to whistle and play
With nothing in my head or my pockets all day,
With nothing in my pockets.

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But along came Old Eagle, like Moses or David,
He stopped at the fourth floor and preached me
Damnation :
" Not a soul shall be savèd, not one shall be
savèd.
The whole First Creation shall forfeit salvation :
From knife-boy to lift-boy, from ragged to regal,
Not one shall be savèd, not you, nor Old Eagle,
No soul on earth escapeth, even if all repent — "
So I cut the cords of the lift and down we went,
With nothing in our pockets.

Can a phonograph lie? Can a phonograph lie?
Can a, can a phonograph?
A song very neatly
Contrived to make you and me
Laugh.

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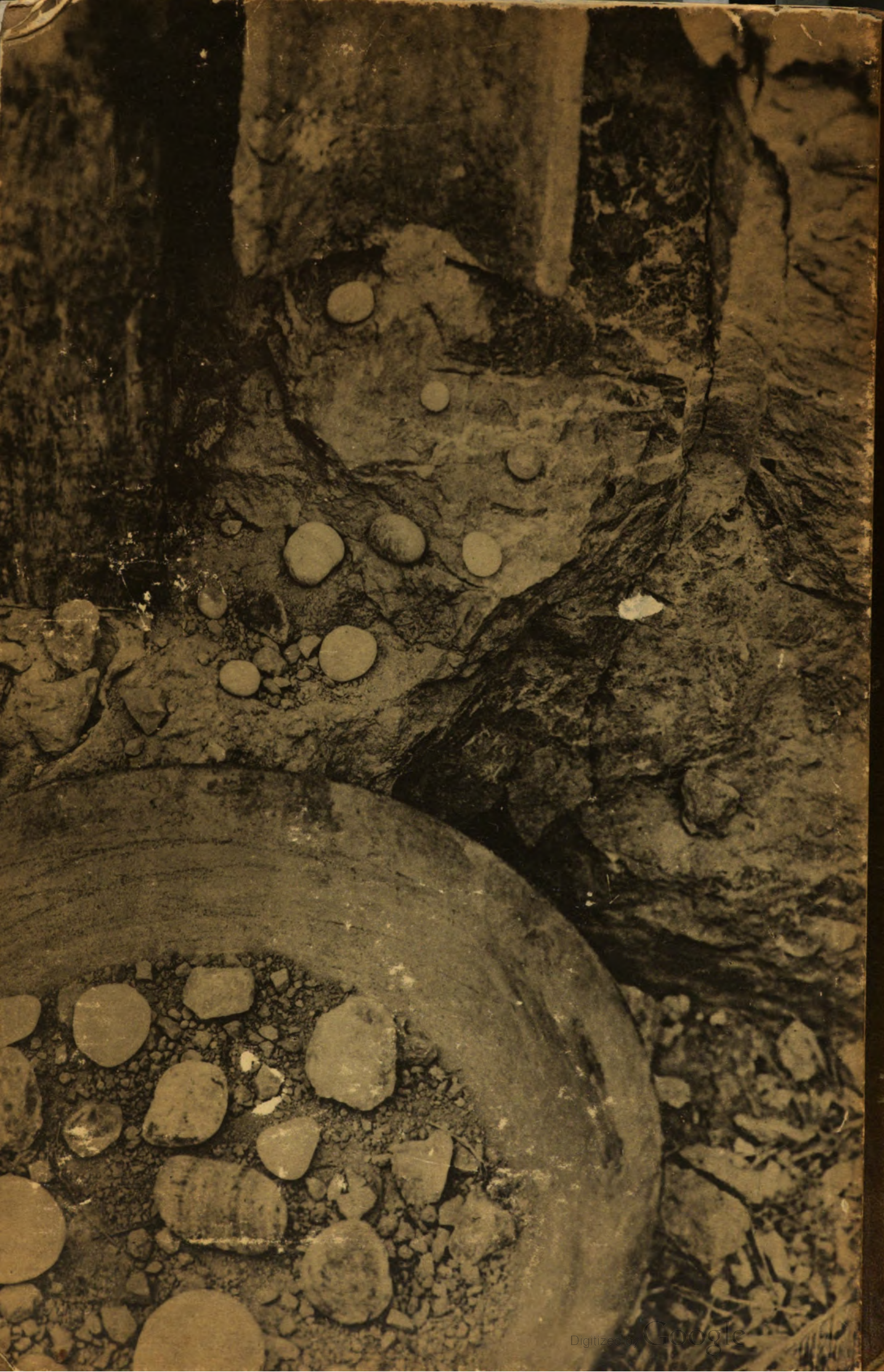

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